



NEWS RELEASE

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GOVERNOR MARTIN O'MALLEY ANNOUNCES MARYLAND REACHES RECORD LOW TRAFFIC FATALITIES

BAN ON TEXTING AND DRIVING STRONGER WITH NEW LAW New Law Sends Drivers Message – Put the Phone Down

(September 30, 2011) – Governor Martin O'Malley today announced Maryland reached a record low number of victims killed in traffic collisions in 2010 – 496 fatalities. The previous low was in 2009 with 550 people lost, a nine percent decrease.

“The efforts of law enforcement, educational outreach and better engineering to reduce fatalities on our roads have achieved positive results,” said Governor O'Malley. “But for those who lost loved ones in traffic crashes last year, 496 victims are still far too many. Our new law strengthening the texting while driving ban is another step toward continuing to reduce traffic deaths.”

Beginning October 1st, if you are thinking of picking up your phone and reading emails at a red light, don't. The prohibition of texting and driving became law two years ago, but did not exclude reading texts. That loophole is now closed. Maryland's Texting While Driving Law takes effect on October 1, 2011 and prohibits all drivers in Maryland from using an electronic device to write, send, or read a text message while operating a motor vehicle in the travel lanes of the roadway. The law does not apply to texting 9-1-1 or using a global positioning system.

“We have seen dramatic declines in traffic fatalities in Maryland in recent years and we want that trend to continue,” Maryland State Police Superintendent Colonel Marcus L. Brown said. “That is why police officers across Maryland are working hard with state and local agencies to inform and educate our citizens about the dangers of texting and cell phone use while driving. We know these activities can be major distractions to drivers and can have deadly consequences.”

The texting law is a primary enforcement law and the activity is a misdemeanor crime. A first offense carries a fine of \$70 and a second offense fine is \$110. According to the US Department of Transportation, an estimated 800,000 vehicles nationally were driven by someone who used a hand-held cell phone during their drive last year.

The AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety reports that 67 percent of drivers admitted to talking on their cell phones within the last 30 days, and 21 percent of drivers indicated they had read or sent a text or e-mail message. That figure rose to 40 percent for drivers under the age of 35.

The first texting while driving law took effect October 1, 2009 and the hands-free cell phone bill became law one year later. From the time each law took effect, police officers from 76 Maryland police departments who use the State Police Electronic Traffic Information Exchange system have issued 587 warnings and 379 traffic citations for driving while texting. Police have issued 4,021 warnings and 5,227 citations for failure to use a hands-free cell phone while driving. Included in those numbers are 325 warnings and 240 citations for texting and 1,859 warnings and 2,905 traffic citations for cell phone use issued by the Maryland State Police.

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